

Epiphany 4, 2017

“And Jesus arose, and rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, ‘Peace, be still.’ And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.” (St. Mark 4. 39)

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

A number of years ago, Kelly and I decided to explore the farthest end of Long Island – the farthest end from our place, that is. So we put our canoe in near the Wickham Wharf and began to paddle up river. However, within half an hour, the sky began to darken and the wind picked up. Waves were beginning to impede our progress, but we continued on, hoping that the weather would pass. It wasn’t long, though, before that we felt the first rain drop. Knowing that this was going to be a full-blown storm, we headed for the island and beached just across from the cottages at the foot of Bostwick Lane. By then the wind was driving the rain into our faces and the river was full of whiter caps.

Quickly, we pulled the canoe in, turned it over and rolled ourselves underneath. We tried to talk while the rain bounced wildly off our makeshift ‘roof’ and the wind whistled all around. And then, as quickly as it had come, the storm stopped and everything was quiet.

This morning’s Gospel also relates the story of a storm. The Lord Jesus and some of His disciples were out on the water in the evening. He had been teaching a crowd of people all day and decided to rest in the back of the boat. After He fell asleep, the Gospel says that “as great storm of wind arose, and the waves beat into the ship” – so much so that the boat became filled with water! Try to imagine that: it was getting dark; the wind is fierce; there is nothing you can do to stop it; the waves are beating against your boat and it is filling up with water. Plus, you are being violently tossed up and down, and all around, and you cannot stand up for fear of getting thrown overboard. You begin to shake uncontrollably with fear. This situation is totally out of your control. What next?

The Gospel says that Jesus remained asleep. That must have seemed absolutely incredible to the disciples. They were sure that they were going to die, and there was the Lord sound asleep. But, He was not worried. He was trusting in His heavenly Father. Well, the Gospel says that the disciples came back and woke Jesus. No doubt, with the wind blowing the way it was, and the waves raging, they

were hollering. 'Master!' they cried, 'Do you not care that we are perishing?' 'Don't you care that we are going to drown in this storm?' Then what happened? We are told that He woke up and said three words. He spoke to the wind and to the sea, and said, 'Peace! Be still!' And immediately the storm stopped and there was 'a great calm'. Imagine – in an instant the water was like a mirror; in the blink of eye, they could see the stars. 'Peace,' Jesus said 'be still'.

We are reminded in this miracle of something we say in the Creed. In the Holy Communion, when we use the Nicene Creed, we say: 'I believe...in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds...begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father; through Whom all things were made'. This is taken from something St. Paul told the Church in Colossae. He said, "Christ Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were made, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible..." (1. 15-16). So, because everything was created through Christ, He has power and authority over all aspects of nature. And that's why when the disciples woke Him up, He simply commanded the wind and the waves to be still. He is the Lord – the only-begotten Son of God --the One with all power.

In this morning's Epistle, we hear St. Paul reminding the Christians in Rome of this. They were in a very difficult situation. They were in a hostile environment and facing persecution, torture and even death because of their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But Paul told them, "There is no power except from God; and the governing authorities that exist have been instituted by God". As we think about the governments in power today, we wonder why the Lord would permit bad leaders to have control. But, in the beginning, He created Adam and Eve with free will. He did that because He loved them. He could have made them robots and controlled them; but, in love, He gave them freedom to make their own choices. The Lord stands by and watches as we often misuse our freedom, and bear the consequences. Thankfully, He does not dismiss us, or wash His hands of us. He stays with us through the storms of life and offers us His help.

This is hard for us to believe. Like the disciples, we sometimes think that He doesn't care, or that He has abandoned us. But He hasn't. He is with us always even unto the end of the age. Invisibly, by His Spirit, He dwells with us and in us. And, lovingly and mercifully, He is working out His perfect will in this world. Soon,

we pray, He will return to establish His Kingdom. Then, He will destroy all the powers of evil and wickedness, and set everything right, according to His righteous judgement and justice. Then, as the Prince of Peace, and as the One Who has conquered Death and Hell, Jesus will bring us into the fullness of the new life of the Holy Trinity in Heaven.

After He had brought peace and stilled the waves, as the disciples sat wondering at the calm, Jesus asked them this question: “Why are you so fearful; and how is it you have no faith?” This morning He asks the same to us.

He has died and rose again for us – suffered and shed His Blood for us. He sits at the right hand of the Father and has sent His Spirit to dwell in us. And He has promised to come again to take us to be with Him. Why should we be afraid? Let us put our whole trust and confidence in Him, even as the storms of life rage.

And now unto God Almighty: the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost...